

## FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

# Restoration Phase of the Desatoya Mountains Habitat Resiliency, Health, and Restoration Project

## Finding of No Significant Impact

DOI-BLM-NV-C010-2011-0513-EA

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It is the mission of the Bureau of Land Management to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

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## **BACKGROUND**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Carson City District, Stillwater Field Office is proposing to implement a landscape-scale, multi-year, integrated habitat restoration and maintenance project on BLM administered lands within the Desatoya Mountain Range and adjacent public range lands in Churchill and Lander Counties, Nevada. The project area encompasses approximately 230,000 acres, which includes portions of the Clan Alpine, Porter Canyon, and Edwards Creek livestock grazing allotments, 38% of the Desatoya sage-grouse population management unit (PMU) 0.2% of the Reese River PMU, 84% of the Desatoya Herd Management Area (HMA) and 67% of the Desatoya Wilderness Study Area (WSA). The Environmental Assessment (EA) DOI-BLM-NV-C010-2011-0513 has been prepared to analyze possible impacts of the Desatoya Mountains Habitat Resiliency, Health, and Restoration project. This Finding of No Significant Impact is specifically for the portions of the Proposed Action other than the removal of excess wild horses.

The Proposed Action, excluding wild horse removal, evaluated under EA-DOI-BLM-NV-C010-2011-0513 (pages 12-17, 20-22) is for up to 32,705 acres of ground disturbing treatments over a ten year period including pinyon/juniper (PJ) removal and thinning; wet meadow and spring rehabilitation/protection (includes fencing, pipelines, and troughs); rabbitbrush control using mowing followed by herbicide treatment and reseeding; and a site-specific fuels treatment utilizing prescribed fire, herbicide, and seeding. Additionally, researchers at the University of Nevada Reno (UNR) have set up a long term experimental watershed on private land within Porter Canyon to measure the hydrologic changes associated with PJ removal. Portions of the UNR experiment would be expanded to BLM lands within Porter and Dalton Canyons.

The primary purpose of this part of the Proposed Action is to improve availability, quantity, and quality of sagebrush, woodland, and wet meadow/riparian habitats that multiple wildlife species, wild horses, and livestock depend on. The treatments are needed to restore and enhance degraded sage-grouse habitat stemming from PJ expansion into sagebrush and quality brood rearing habitats and/or excessive wild horse use, as well as differential livestock over-use of meadows. The treatments are also needed to decrease density of PJ that has been identified as a primary factor in mule deer population declines as well as several woodland dependent bird species. Furthermore, the treatments are needed to reduce the high fire risk stemming from increased PJ density and to restore a cheatgrass dominated landscape near Cold Springs that has resulted from previous fires.

## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

Based upon the analysis in the Environmental Assessment (EA) DOI-BLM-NV-C010-2011-0513 Desatoya Resiliency, Health, and Restoration Project it is my determination that the implementation of this part of the Proposed Action will not have significant environmental impacts and that the Proposed Action is in conformance with the Carson City Field Office Consolidated Resources Management Plan (CRMP) adopted in 2001. I have determined that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action, and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. Therefore, an environmental impact statement (EIS) will not be prepared.

## CONTEXT AND INTENSITY

This finding and conclusion is based on the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the *context* and the *intensity* of impacts described in the EA or as articulated in the letters of comment.

**Context:** The Proposed Action is a site-specific action located on public lands administered by the BLM CCDO in Churchill and Lander Counties, Nevada, which by itself does not have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance.

**Intensity:** The following discussion is based on the relevant factors that should be considered in evaluating intensity as described in 40 CFR 1508.27:

***1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency as described believes that on balance the affect will be beneficial.***

I have determined that none of the direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts associated with the Proposed Action are significant, individually or combined. The EA evaluated both beneficial and adverse impacts of the Proposed Action.

The Proposed Action is predominately beneficial to wild horse health, vegetative resources, sensitive species, riparian zones, fish/wildlife habitat, migratory birds, livestock grazing, soils, and watersheds. No more than 5000 acres of vegetation treatments would occur in any given year over a ten year period.

***2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.***

Reducing fuel loads by thinning woodlands would reduce fire risk, thus decreasing potential risk to public health and safety stemming from a future catastrophic fire. The herbicides that are applied to control rabbitbrush, as well as cheatgrass for the Cold Springs fuels treatment, would be in conformance with both the Programmatic Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides on Bureau of Land Management Lands in 17 Western States EIS and Record of Decision. This would include proper safety measures and the requirement that the applicator be certified or under the direct supervision of a certified applicator. Herbicides would be applied according to label instructions. Therefore, effects to public health and safety would be negligible.

***3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.***

The BLM Interdisciplinary Team (ID) identified the following Supplemental Authorities as being not present and present/not affected: Air Quality, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Cultural Resources, Environmental Justice, Farm Lands Prime or Unique, Forests and Rangelands, Floodplains, Native American Religious Concerns, Threatened and Endangered Species (plant and animal), Wastes Hazardous or Solid, Water Quality, Wild and Scenic Rivers and Wilderness. The ID team identified the following Supplemental Authorities as being present/may be affected: Cultural Resources, Invasive, Nonnative and Noxious Species, Migratory Birds, Native American Religious Concerns, Human Health/Safety (regarding wild horse gather), and Wetlands/Riparian Zones. Resources Other Than Supplemental Authorities identified as being present/may be affected include: BLM Sensitive Species, Fish/Wildlife

(vegetative resources), Wild Horses, Livestock Grazing, Fire Management, and Soils. The Supplemental Authorities and Resources other than Supplemental Authorities that may be present and may be affected were evaluated in DOI-BLM-NV-C010-2011-0513-EA.

The results of a BLM literature review at the Carson City District and the Nevada Cultural Resource Information System (NVCRIS) revealed eighteen Class III cultural resource inventories that have been conducted within the area of implementation (32,705 acres) between 1976 and 2011. Approximately one hundred and fifty cultural resources (prehistoric historic and ethno-historic) were documented and evaluated (91 eligible and 50 non eligible). If unanticipated historic-era or prehistoric resources are discovered during project activities, work would cease and be reported immediately to the BLM. In the event that any location is relocated a member of the BLM cultural staff will inventory the potential site, if cultural resources are identified this site will be dismissed from consideration and an additional site will be proposed until a suitable site is found that will not impact cultural resources.

The Fallon Paiute-Shoshone and Yomba Shoshone Tribes were notified of the restoration project and no substantial concerns were identified by the Tribes. The BLM has been and would continue to conduct government to government consultation with the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe and the Yomba Shoshone Tribe during all phases of the Project (Per 36 CFR Part 800 and 43 CFR Part 8100, as amended).

No treatments will occur in the Desatoya Wilderness Study Area (WSA). Ground disturbing treatments will occur in the Desatoya sage-grouse population management unit, but are intended to benefit sage-grouse.

***4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.***

The Proposed Action is predominately beneficial and improvements in resource condition and environmental quality are anticipated to occur as a result of implementing the project. This is demonstrated through the effects analysis in the EA.

***5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.***

The analysis provided in the EA does not indicate that this action would involve any unique or unknown risks. Relevant components of the human environment which would be either affected or potentially affected by the Proposed Action and other alternatives were addressed through the affects analyzed in this EA.

***6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.***

The Proposed Action alternative does not set a precedent for future actions within the project boundary within the ten year life of the project.

***7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.***

The Proposed Action is not related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulative impacts.

**8. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.***

The restoration component of the Proposed Action has no potential to adversely affect significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. Cultural resources would be identified prior to implementation or treatments; eligible properties would be avoided, and a programmatic agreement between the BLM, partners, and the Nevada State historic preservation officer has been developed for the life of the project.

**9. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the ESA of 1973.***

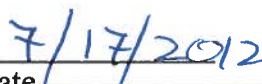
The Proposed Action will have no affect to any federally listed species under the ESA.

**10. *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.***

The restoration component of the Proposed Action is in compliance with the CRMP. The Proposed Action is consistent with Statutes, regulations and policies of neighboring local, county, State, Tribal governments and other federal agencies. The Proposed Action does not violate or threaten to violate any Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

  
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Date